

AN
ORATION,
DELIVERED ON
THE ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,
July 4, 1794,
IN
SAINT MICHAEL'S CHURCH,
TO THE
INHABITANTS
OF
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA,
BY
DAVID RAMSEY, M. D.
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

" Oh, Liberty! Heaven's choice Prerogative,
" True bond of Law, thou social Soul of Property,
" Thou Breath of Reason---for thee the valiant bled."

L O N D O N :

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FRIENDS, COUNTRYMEN, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS!

ON this day eighteen years a nation was born at once, a new order of things arose, and an illustrious æra in the history of human affairs commenced. The ties which before had joined us to Great Britain were severed, and we assumed a place among the nations of the earth.

Having delivered the first oration that was spoken in the United States, to celebrate this great event, I feel myself doubly honored in

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being again called upon, after a lapse of sixteen years, to perform the same duty. Were my abilities equal to the important subject, your entertainment would be great; but I must cast myself on your candor, and solicit indulgence, for falling far short of that display of eloquence which this eventful day is calculated to inspire.

It is worthy of remark, that the discovery of America was nearly coincident with the invention of the art of printing, and of the mariner's compass. From these three sources the condition of mankind has been greatly improved. By means of the art of printing, the darkness of ignorance, which for many centuries had overshadowed mankind, has given place to the light of knowledge, and learned men of every clime constitute but one republic. In consequence of the mariner's compass all the nations of our globe form one extended family, reciprocally administering to the wants of each other. May I be allowed to add, that the discovery of America was the first link of a chain of causes, which bids fair to enlarge the happiness of mankind, by regenerating the principles of government in every



every quarter of the globe. Among the events resulting from this discovery, and which led to that GREAT REVOLUTION, the declaration of independence, is conspicuously pre-eminent. I will not wound your ears, on this festive day, by a repetition of the many injuries received by this country from Great Britain, which forced us to cut the gordian knot which before had joined us together. Suffice it to observe, that for the twelve years preceding the 4th of July, 1776, claim rose on claim, injury followed injury, and oppression trod on the heels of oppression, till we had no alternative left, but that of abject slavery or complete independence. The spirit of freedom decided in favor of the latter: Heaven smiled on our exertions. After an eight years war, in which our countrymen displayed the patience, the perseverance, and the magnanimity of republicans, struggling for every thing that is dear to freemen, their most sanguine wishes were realized. The government of Great Britain, which began the war to enforce the claim, to bind us *in all cases whatsoever*, after spending a hundred millions of money, and sacrificing a hundred thousand subjects, to no purpose, was obliged to give up the contest, to retire from our

shores, and to relinquish, by a solemn treaty, all claim to bind us *in any case whatsoever*. Such a triumph of liberty could not fail of vibrating round the world. A great and mighty nation on the other side of the Atlantic, in imitation of our example, has abolished a system of oppression, under which their forefathers for so many centuries had groaned. We trust and hope, that they will discover as great abilities in planning and executing a good NEW government as they have hitherto done in destroying an ancient bad one. Should this well-founded expectation be realized, we may hope that revolutions will follow revolutions, till despotism is banished from our globe. In this point of view, the enlarged philanthropist must not only rejoice in the benefits acquired by this country from its independence, but still more in those which are likely to flow from it to the oppressed of every country.

It may seem presumptuous for us, who are a nation of but yesterday, to arrogate to ourselves the merit of having enlightened mankind in the art of government: but we became an independent people under circumstances so favorable to the

the rights of man, that great indeed must have been our stupidity, had we not done so. When we review the origin of other nations, we find that accidental circumstances had a principal share in forming their constitutions. At one time a successful invader, at another a daring chieftain, fixed the constituent parts of their government; but it never was known, anterior to our days, that a great, wise, and enlightened people, were peaceably convened by their representatives to deliberate on the principles of a constitution, by which they were to be governed. From the first settlement of this country, every thing concurred to inspire its inhabitants with the love of liberty: the facility of procuring landed property, gave every citizen an opportunity of becoming an independent freeholder. Remote from the influence of KINGS, BISHOPS, and NOBLES, the equality of rights was inculcated by the experience of every day. Having grown up to maturity under circumstances so favorable to liberty, and then being at once severed from all connection with the old world, the people of this country, in forming a constitution for their future government, had every incitement to establish such principles as promised

mised to secure the greatest possible sum of political good, with the least possible portion of evil. When such a people became perfectly their own masters, and free to adopt any constitution they pleased, great would have been their shame had they not improved on those forms of government WHICH ORIGINATED IN TIMES OF DARKNESS, AND WERE INSTITUTED UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF PRIVILEGED ORDERS. On this anniversary of our independence it cannot be improper to shew, that this has actually been done, and that in consequence thereof we enjoy advantages, rights, and privileges, superior to most, if not to all, of the human race. Bear with me, then, while I attempt to demonstrate this, by a detail of particulars.

In entering on this subject, where shall I begin? Where shall I end? Proofs are unnecessary, I need only appeal to experience. I have a witness in the breast of every one who hears me and who knows the condition of the common people in other countries. In the United States the blessings of society are enjoyed with the least possible relinquishment of personal liberty. We have hit the happy medium between despot-

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ism and anarchy. Every citizen is perfectly free of the will of every other citizen, while all are equally subject to the laws. Among us no one can exercise any authority by virtue of birth. All start equal in the race of life. No man is born a legislator. We are not bound by any laws but those to which we have consented. We are not called upon to pay our money to support the idleness and extravagance of court favorites. No burdens are imposed on us, but such as the public good requires. No enormous salaries are received by the few at the expence of the many. No taxes are levied but such as are laid equally on the legislator and private citizen. No man can be deprived of his life, liberty, or property, but by the operation of laws, freely, fairly, and by common consent previously enacted.

The liberty of the press is enjoyed in these States, in a manner that is unknown in other countries. EACH CITIZEN THINKS WHAT HE PLEASES, AND SPEAKS AND WRITES WHAT HE THINKS. Pardon me, illustrious Washington! that I have inwardly rejoiced on seeing thy much-respected name abused in our
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newspapers. Slanders against thy adamantine character, are as harmless as pointless arrows shot from broken bows; but they prove that our printing presses are free. The doors of our legislative assemblies are open, and the conduct of our state officers may be safely questioned before the bar of the public, by any private citizen. So great is the responsibility of men in high stations among us, that it is the fashion to rule well. We read of the rapacity, cruelty, and oppression of men in power; but our rulers seem, for the most part, to be exempt from these vices. Such are the effects of governments formed on equal principles, that men in authority, cannot easily forget, that they are the servants of the community over which they preside. Our rulers, taken from the people, and at stated periods returning to them, have the strongest incitement to make the public will their guide, and the public good their end.

Among the privileges enjoyed by the citizens of these States, we may reckon AN EXEMPTION FROM ECCLESIASTICAL ESTABLISHMENTS. *These promote hypocrisy, and uniformly have been engines of oppression.* They have transmitted
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error from one generation to another, and restrained that free spirit of enquiry which leads to improvement. In this country no priests can decimate the fruits of our industry, nor is any preference, whatever, given to one sect above another.

Religious freedom, banished from almost every other corner of the globe, has fixed her standard among us, and kindly invites the distressed from all quarters to repair hither. In some places fire and faggot await the man who presumes to exercise his reason in matters of faith. In others a national creed is established, and exclusion from office is inflicted on all, however worthy, who dare to dissent. In these happy States, it is a fundamental constitutional point, "that no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust."

The experience of eighteen years, has proved that this universal equality is the most effectual method of preserving peace among contending sects. It has also demonstrated, that the church and state are distinct societies; can very well subsist without any alliance or dependence on

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each other. While the government, without partiality to any denomination, leaves all to stand on an equal footing, none can prove successful, but by the learning, virtue, and piety of its professors.

Our political situation, resulting from independence, tends to exalt and improve the minds of our citizens. GREAT OCCASIONS ALWAYS PRODUCE GREAT MEN. While we were *subjects*, the functions of government were performed *for* us, but not *by* us. To administer the public affairs of fifteen States, and of four millions of people, the military, civil, and political talents of many will be necessary. Every office, in each of these multifarious departments, is open to every citizen, who has the abilities requisite for the discharge of its duties. Such prospects cannot fail of exciting a laudable ambition in our youth to make themselves worthy of public confidence.

It is one of the peculiar privileges we enjoy, in consequence of independence, that no individual, no party-interest, no foreign influence can plunge us into war. Under our excellent
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constitution, that scourge of nations will be avoided, unless unprovoked and unredressed injuries rouse the body of the people. Had we not asserted our rank among nations, we, as appendages to Great Britain, should this day have been engaged in hostilities against France, though bravely struggling for the rights of man: and all this at the call of a foreign master, and without any voice or will of our own in the matter. Think of the cruel war now carrying on by kings and nobles against the equal rights of man—call to mind the slaughtered thousands, whose blood is daily shedding on the plains of Europe, and let your daily tribute of thanks ascend to the common Parent of the universe, who has established you in a separate government, exempt from participating in these horrid scenes.

To all the advantages of neutrality, we, as an independent people, are entitled by the laws of nations, of nature, and of God. But it must be acknowledged, that at present we are deprived of many of them. The same spirit which influenced Great Britain to attempt the subversion of our independence, has led her to commit unwarranted outrages on our commerce. If the

voice and interest of the people of that country was the rule of their government, as it is with us, those aggressions on our rights would never have taken place ; but unfortunately for them, and for us, the interests of the great body of their subjects have been sacrificed to the fears and jealousies of their privileged orders. In the madness of their zeal to restrain France from doing what every independent nation has a right to do, they have needlessly plunged their own country into a ruinous war ; and in the prosecution of it, instead of respecting our rights, as a neutral nation, they have treated us as if we were their subjects, bound to forego every branch of our, accustomed, lawful commerce, that might, in their apprehension, contravene their designs. Many thanks to our worthy President, for his honest endeavors to preserve to us the blessings of peace. May they be successful ; but if, on their failure, the last extremity must be resorted to, we may call heaven and earth to witness, that all the blood, and all the guilt of war, will lie at the door of Great Britain. Peace was our interest—peace was our wish ; and for the preservation of it, the government and people of these States have done every thing that was reasonable and proper

proper for them to do. May the sword of the United States never be unsheathed for the purposes of ambition: but if it must be uplifted in self-defence, may it fall with decisive effect on the disturbers of mankind. I beg pardon for this digression, and with pleasure turn away from contemplating the follies of that government, a separation from which we this day celebrate, that I may proceed in pointing out the superior advantages, which we, as an independent people, enjoy.

If we are to judge of the excellence of a government from its fruits, in the happiness of its subjects, we have abundant reason to be pleased with our own.—Since the peace of 1783, our country has been in a state of progressive improvement—debts, and other embarrassments, growing out of the late war, are, in most cases, nearly annihilated. Our numbers have been greatly augmented, both from the introduction of foreigners, and the natural increase of our own citizens. Our exports and imports have overflowed all their ancient boundaries. A revenue sufficient to support national credit, and to satisfy all other public exigencies, has been easily raised,

raised, and that without burdening the people. Upon an average, five of our CITIZENS do not pay as much to the support of government as one European SUBJECT. The whole sum expended in administering the public affairs of the United States, is not equal to the fourth part of what is annually spent in supporting one crowned head in Europe.

From the increase of our trade and population, new ports are daily opened, and new towns and cities *lift* their heads in all directions. The wilderness on our western frontier is constantly lessening by the extension of new settlements. Many who now hear me, have been witnesses to a legislature of a state, comfortably accommodated in a place, where seven years ago the trees of the forest had never experienced the axe of the husbandman.

It was hoped by our enemies, and feared by our friends, that the people of independent America would not readily coalesce under a government sufficiently energetic for the security of property and the preservation of internal peace ;
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but they have both been disappointed. In these States, there is a vigorous exertion of the laws, and an upright administration of justice. Property and personal rights are well secured; criminals are easily brought to suffer the punishment due to their demerits; and no legal impediment exists in the way of creditors recovering the full amount of what is due to them. These blessings are secured to us without the intervention of a standing army. Our government, resting on the affections of the people, needs no other support than that of CITIZEN-SOLDIERS. How unlike this to foreign countries, where enormous taxes are necessary to pay standing armies, and where standing armies are necessary to secure the payment of enormous taxes.

Time would fail me to enumerate all the superior advantages our citizens enjoy under that free government to which independence gave birth. I may safely affirm, in general, that as it proceeded from the people, it has been administered for their benefit. The public good has been the pole star by which its operations have been directed.

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That we may rightly prize our political condition, let us cast our eyes over the inhabitants of the old world, and contrast their situation with our own. A few among them are exalted to be more than men, but the great bulk of the people, bowed down under the galling yoke of oppression, are in a state of dependence which debases human nature. In the benighted regions of Asia and Africa, ignorance and despotism frown over the unhappy land. The lower classes are treated like beasts of burden, and transferred without ceremony from one master to another. In some parts of Europe, the condition of the peasantry is not *quite so bad*; but in what country are the rights and happiness of the common people so much respected as in these States? In this enumeration I purposely omit France. Her former government was one of the worst. We trust and hope, that when peace is restored, her enlightened rulers will furnish a new and strong proof of the connection between liberty and happiness.

Among the established governments of Europe, that of Great Britain deservedly stands high: what is faulty in that we have avoided,
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what is excellent in it we have transplanted in our own, with additions and improvements. Is trial by jury the pride of Britons? It is in like manner the birth-right of our citizens. Do Englishmen boast of the privileges they enjoy by virtue of the Act of Parliament, commonly called the Habeas Corpus Act? We enjoy the same, and with more facility, for with us two magistrates (one of whom is of the quorum) are empowered to give all the relief to a confined citizen which is contemplated by that act. Do Englishmen glory in the revolution of 1688, and of the cotemporary Acts of Parliament, which declared the rights and liberties of the subject? We have much more reason to be proud of our constitution. Whoever examines these declaratory acts of the English Parliament, will find, that all the provisions in favor of liberty which they contain, fly up and kick the beam, when weighed against the following single sentence of our constitution—"All power is originally vested in the People, and all free governments are founded on their authority, and instituted for their peace, safety, and happiness."

It is true, that by the revolution of 1688, the people of England got a *foreign* prince to rule

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over them on better terms than their own *domestic tyrants* had done ; but nevertheless, they only exchanged one master for another : for in their Act of Settlement, *to use their own words*, “ they most humbly and faithfully submitted “ themselves, their heirs, and their posterities.” This æra was only the early dawn of that liberty, which shines on us in its noon-tide blaze. It was reserved for Americans to put government on its proper foundation, the sovereignty of the People.

Do Englishmen value themselves on what is called Magna Charta ? In the preamble to this *celebrated instrument*, it is stated, that “ the “ king, of his *mere free will*, gave and granted “ to all freemen of his realm, the liberties,” which are therein specified. What is said to be thus given and granted by the free will of the sovereign, we, the people of America, hold in our own right. The sovereignty rests in ourselves, and instead of receiving the privilege of free citizens as a boon from the hands of our rulers, we defined their powers by a constitution of our own framing, which prescribed to them, that thus far they might go, but no farther. All power, not thus expressly delegated, is retained.

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Here let us pause, and leisurely survey the difference between a CITIZEN and a SUBJECT. A free citizen, of a free state, is the highest title of man. A subject is born in a state of dependence, and bound to obey. A citizen has within himself a portion of sovereignty, and is capable of forming or amending the constitution, by which he is to be governed; and of electing, or of being elected, to the office of its first magistrate. In monarchies, the subjects are what they are by the *grace of their sovereign*; but in free representative governments, rulers are what they are by the GRACE of the People.

In comparing the construction of the legislative assemblies of these states with the parliament of Great Britain, how striking the contrast! Here the representatives are appointed on such principles as collect and transmit the real sentiments of the represented: but in Great Britain the Parliament is a mockery of representation. The electors are but a handful of the whole mass of subjects. Large towns have few or no representatives, while decayed boroughs are authorised to send infinitely more than would be their quota on any reasonable system. In these States, the legislative assemblies are like minia-

ture pictures of the whole community, where each part retains its comparative importance, though on a reduced scale. In the parliament of Great Britain, the few give law to the many. It has been demonstrated, by calculations on this subject, that the majority of the English house of commons is chosen by less than eight thousand persons, though the kingdom contains more than eight millions of subjects. Here the views and wishes of the legislature are for the most part the views and wishes of the people: but in England the reverse is often the case. In the British Parliament, the minister, with a pensioned majority, may carry what schemes he pleases; but in our legislative assemblies, every overture must stand or fall according to its real or apparent tendency to help or hurt the people. Thus might I go on, till I outraged your patience, in demonstrating the superiority of our government over those which are reputed the best in the old world.

With such a constitution, and with such extensive territory, as we possess, to what height of national greatness may we not aspire? Some of our large states have territory superior to the islands of Great Britain, and the whole together are

are little inferior to Europe itself. The natural advantages of our country are many and great. We are not left to depend on others for our support and strength. Our luxurious soil is capable of producing, not only enough for the increasing multitude that inhabits it, but a surplussage for exportation, sufficient to supply the wants of hundreds of thousands in foreign countries. Our numbers, if they continue to increase as they hitherto have done, will, in less than a century, amount to forty millions. The light of science is kindling up in every corner of these States. Manufactures, and all the useful arts, are making a rapid progress among us; while agriculture, the first and best employment of man, surpasses all its ancient limits. With pleasure I could dwell on the pleasing prospect of our rising greatness; but I hasten to point out what is the line of conduct proper to be pursued by those who are so highly favored. We ought, in the first place, to be grateful to the all-wise Disposer of events, who has given us so great a portion of political happiness. To possess such a country, with the blessings of liberty and peace, together with that security of person and property, which results from a well-ordered efficient govern-

government, is, or ought to be, matter of constant thankfulness.

Industry, frugality, and temperance, are virtues which we should eminently cultivate. These are the only foundation on which a popular government can rest with safety. Republicans should be plain in their apparel, their entertainments, their furniture, and their equipage. Idleness, extravagance, and dissipation of every kind, should be banished from our borders. It is from the industrious alone that we can gather strength. The virtues now recommended are those which prepared infant Rome for all her greatness, and it is only from the practice of them that we can expect to attain that rank among nations, to which our growing numbers and extensive territory entitle us to aspire.

While we celebrate this day, we should call to recollection those who have nobly fallen in support of independence. Time would fail to do them justice individually. To mention the names of some, seems a species of injury to others, who are equally deserving of our praise. It is the business of the historian to recite their names and to tell their gallant deeds. Let us,
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while we recollect their virtues, be animated with the love of our country, that, like them, when called upon, we may die in its defence.

Many of those tried friends, who bravely fought our battles, or who wisely conducted our civil affairs, through the late revolution, have taken their leave of this earthly stage, and a new generation has nearly grown up in their places. On them it depends to finish what their fathers have begun. Much is still wanting to perfect our internal police. As our government rests on the broad base of the People, every exertion should be made to diffuse virtue and knowledge among them. The *uninformed* and *misinformed* are fit tools to subserve the views of the turbulent and ambitious. Ignorance is the enemy of Liberty and the nurse of Despotism. Let it, therefore, be our study to multiply and facilitate the means of instruction, through every part of our country.

This would be a safe and constitutional antidote to aristocracy. In these States, where the rights of primogeniture are abolished—where offices are open to all—where elections are frequent, and the right of suffrage is universal and equal ;

equal; if we go one step farther, and give the poor the means of education, as well as the rich, our yeomanry can have nothing to fear from any man, or any association of men, however distinguished by birth, office, fortune or abilities.

Had I a voice that could be heard from New Hampshire to Georgia, it should be exerted in urging the necessity of disseminating virtue and knowledge among our citizens. On this subject, the policy of the eastern states is well worthy of imitation. The wise people of that extremity of the Union, never form a new township, without making arrangements that secure to its inhabitants the instruction of youth and the public preaching of the gospel. Hence their children are early taught to know their rights, and to respect themselves. They grow up good members of society, and staunch defenders of their country's cause. No daring demagogue—no crafty Cataline—no ambitious Cæsar, can make any impression on the liberties of such an enlightened people.

To France is assigned the task of defending republicanism by arms; but our duty is of a different kind. Separated by the wide Atlantic from

from the bloody dissensions of the old world, we should study to cultivate every useful art—to enjoy in peace with all mankind the numerous blessings which Providence has thrown in our way—to transmit them to posterity, and to extend them to all within our reach. This ought to be the ambition of Americans, and not to seek an enlargement of their dominion, or to build their advancement on the degradation of others.

We should, above all things, study to promote the union and harmony of the different States. Perish the man who wishes to divide us, into back country and low country, into a northern and southern, or into an eastern and western interest. Forming one empire we shall be truly respectable; but divided into two, or more, we must become the sport of foreign nations, and peace will be for ever exiled from our borders. The unity and indivisibility of the republic is an essential part of the French Constitution, so it ought to be with us. We should consider the people of this country, from the Mississippi to the Atlantic, from New Hampshire to Georgia, as forming one whole, the interest of which should be preferred to that of every part. Even

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the prejudices, peculiarities, and local habits of the different states, should be respected and tenderly dealt with.

The art of government has never been brought near to that degree of perfection of which it is capable. It is lamentably true that it seldom or never has been administered with any express view to its proper object, the happiness of the governed. We should be fired with the generous ambition of teaching mankind, by our example, that the people are capable of governing themselves to better purpose than it ever has been done by *kings* and *privileged orders*. Men of high rank, in Europe, have asserted, that a government formed at noon, on the equal principles we have adopted, would terminate before the setting of the sun. This day begins the nineteenth year of ours, and it is now stronger, and more firmly established than it ever was. We know, by experience, that the costly pageantry of kings and courts, is not essential to political happiness. From the vigour of our free government, and essentially from its answering every purpose that a government ought to answer, the world may learn, that there is no necessity, in the nature of things, for man to lord
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it over man. Inferences may be fairly drawn from our present happy political situation, which lead to the extirpation of despotism from the face of the globe. Let us forward this desirable revolution, not by officiously intermeddling with the internal polity of foreign countries, but by exhibiting such an accumulation of private virtue and public happiness, that other nations, struck with the fruits of our excellent constitution, may be induced, from free choice, to new model their own on similar principles.

The eyes of the world are fixed on this country and on France. The abettors of tyranny are anxiously looking for opportunities to discredit the new doctrines of the rights of man. They, on every occasion, represent them as leading to confusion and anarchy. Equality of rights, and equality of property, is, in their opinion, one and the same thing. Let the wisdom of our laws, and the orderly conduct of our citizens, disappoint their wishes, and give the lie to their calumnies. Let us teach them, by our example, that genuine republicanism is friendly to order, and a proper subordination in society—that it is hostile to mobs, and licentiousness of every kind, but the firm supporter of constituted
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authorities—the guardian of property, as well as of the rights of man.

France is daily proving, that a handful of citizens, fighting under the banners of Liberty, is more than a match for an host of mercenaries, engaged in support of Tyranny. It remains for us to recommend free governments, by the example of a peaceable, orderly, virtuous, and happy people. We should press forward in accomplishing every thing that can add to the common stock of public good. While war, with its horrid attendants, is the pastime of kings, let it be the study of republicans, to make unceasing advances in every thing that can improve, refine or embellish society. Animated with this noble ambition, the superior happiness of our country will amply repay us for the blood and treasure which independence has cost. May that ambition fire our breasts, and may that happiness increase, and know no end, till time shall be no more.

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